



NEWS

'I'm Broken': Ex-Prosecutor Carlos Vega Testifies in Suit Over Firing From Phila. DA's Office

Vega, 66, sued the city of Philadelphia alleging District Attorney Larry Krasner fired him based on his age. Krasner was dismissed as a defendant in October, but he remained a central figure in the dispute and attended the trial.

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4 minute read

Employment Law

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- Trial began Monday in former homicide prosecutor Carlos Vega's age discrimination suit against the city of Philadelphia.
- Vega claimed District Attorney Larry Krasner, no longer a party in the suit, fired him because of his age.
- The defendant said Krasner fired Vega because he did not think Vega would fit with the district attorney's model of progressive prosecution.

Former homicide prosecutor Carlos Vega at times spoke through tears as he gave testimony Monday about his 2018 firing from the Philadelphia District Attorney's Office.

Vega, 66, was the only witness to speak during the first day of trial in his lawsuit against the city of Philadelphia, alleging District Attorney Larry Krasner fired him based on his age. Krasner was dismissed as a defendant in October, but he remained a central figure in the dispute.

"He took away something I can never get back," Vega said of Krasner.

Though no longer a party in the suit, Krasner sat alongside defense counsel for the duration of Monday's proceedings, which took place before U.S. District Judge Gene Pratt of the Eastern District of Pennsylvania.

Robert Davitch of Sidkoff, Pincus & Green presented opening statements on behalf of the plaintiff, alleging Krasner targeted Vega as part of a discriminatory effort to replace aging prosecutors in the DA's Office with younger lawyers.

According to the plaintiffs, Krasner fired Vega without cause after serving 35 years at the office, during which he gained a reputation as a skilled trial attorney.



David Smith of Schnader Harrison Segal & Lewis, opening for the defendant, said age had nothing to do with Vega's termination, noting that the office both terminated and retained attorneys within a wide age range. Instead, Smith said, Krasner did not think Vega was qualified to serve in the DA's new, progressive administration.

"The coach gets to pick the team," Smith said.

Vega had been one of 30 prosecutors asked to resign Jan. 5, 2018, three days after Krasner took office. Vega called that day "humiliating."

"Some people were on the floor crying," he said.

Vega said he refused to resign and was subsequently fired and escorted to pack up his belongings and leave the building.

"I couldn't believe it," he said, "because I've worked under five administrations, and line prosecutors don't get terminated."

When responding to questioning from plaintiffs co-counsel Sidney Gold, of Sidney L. Gold and Associates, as to the emotional toll of his firing, Vega said the ordeal left him feeling worthless. He cried while recalling his conversations with his children in the aftermath of his termination.

"It's embarrassing to say I'm broken," he said.

Vega had been 61 when he was fired and said many of the other assistant district attorneys Krasner ousted in his first few days in office were likewise in the protected age group of 40 and older. He said he never received any reason for his termination.

Vega filed an age discrimination complaint to the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission, to which Krasner responded with a verified statement.

In that statement, Krasner said he based his decision on decades of working across from city prosecutors, and particularly on Vega's conduct during a homicide case in which the two were opposing counsel. Krasner said Vega behaved unethically during the case, which colored his decision to remove him from the DA's Office.

Vega's firing came only several years before his planned retirement in 2021. While he could still collect his pension, he lost a lump-sum payment that had been part of his retirement agreement with the city, according to his testimony.

Vega said he sent several job applications to the state Attorney General's Office and various district attorney's offices, but they went unanswered. He said he was unwilling to work as a defense attorney and believed he was too late in his career to begin working at a civil firm.

Vega and fellow ex-prosecutor Joseph Whitehead Jr. sued Krasner and the city for age discrimination in 2019, and Whitehead later settled. Several other assistant district attorneys who had lost their jobs in the wave of firings had brought similar suits that also ended in settlements.

In addition to facing off against Krasner in court, Vega was Krasner's opponent in the 2021 Democratic primary for the district attorney seat but was defeated by a wide margin.

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